

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In view of the multifarious problems that are characteristic of research in Indian history, specially those relating to the source of material, the need of finding out newer methods for ascertaining facts can not be overemphasised. Whereas the great mass of textual and archaeological source-material available to us enables to reconstruct a plausible picture of the political and social life in Medieval India, the cultural history of the period remains largely unexplored for the want of adequate source of information. Official chronicles and other historical accounts concern with this aspect only to the extent of giving biographical notes or at the most with the fine arts, specially poetry. Princess and kings are found at times giving casual accounts in their Memoirs of experiences involving the activities and aspirations of common people; yet their fragmentary evidences are hardly helpful to us in the way of constructing a wholesome view.

It is indeed impossible to mark out the confines of the cultural life of a people. The material expression of a people's achievement in the field of culture may be understood. The literature, the architecture, the technology and the science of a particular period may be gauged in terms of the amount of work produced. But the character of one culture cannot be differentiated from another on that basis except in the broadest of terms. A better understanding

occurs from an intimate acquaintance of the manners and customs, the peculiarities of private and public life, attitudes and aspirations, the dresses they wear, the kind of entertainment they have, the ways and means of satisfying their aesthetic sensibilities, the forms of the articles they use and the spirit underlying their adventures and vocations. As a matter of fact it is like one living in the times oneself. It is ultimately on this experience that a correct appreciation even of the art and literature of a people in the past depends.

In the absence of textual evidences nothing can be of greater value than contemporary paintings for the purpose. More than any amount of words the visual experience acquired through this medium provides us in illustrated form the knowledge of a variety of those things that a chronicler would never even think of as worthy of report. Fortunately the Mughal period is the richest in this respect. The Mughal kings maintained a whole establishment of painters and it was under Akbar that special attention was paid and funds were made available in order to maintain a sufficiently big establishment of court painters. Jahangir and Shahjahan as also the later Mughals continued the practice and consequently we have a continuous record of their paintings. A good many of these have been lost yet those that we have, provide us with ample ground for studying the culture of the times.

In the tradition of the Persian court, painting was first patronised by the Mughals as a medium of illustrating dastans and masnavis.

Akbar's interest was to expand the sphere of the subjects chosen for illustration. Besides, the chronicles of the imperial house viz. the Akbarnama; Tuzuk-i-Baburi, Tarikh-i-alfi etc; the great books of Hindus - Ramayana; Razmnama - a translation of Mahabharata and Hariyansha were taken for the illustration work. Many illustrated manuscripts: Hamzahnamah; Tutinama; Diwan of Anvari ; Diwan of Shahi; Anwar-i-suhaili; Diwan-i-Hafiz; Razmnama; Ramayana; Tarikh-i-alfi; Tuzuk-i-Baburi; Akbarnama; Darabnama; Hariyansha etc. etc. have survived to this day. Some of them were repeatedly drawn. There different copies in good condition are preserved in the various art collections.

The artists of these collections were primarily concerned with the representation of themes usually selected at the behest of the patrons. Nevertheless, within the limited scope left to them, they expanded upon them while composing the objects, thus allowing for the inclusion of a number of other objects and items depending upon personal experience and imagination. For instance, common peoples could be introduced in the background or on distant corner in order to fill-up the space or enliven the scene.

The painters belonged to the court of Akbar. To what extent their creations may be accepted as being in consonance with the actual times depicted, is very difficult to determine. Infact in respect of a number of items one is faced with the imperative to ascertain whether or not the version may be accepted as authentic. Customs and practices of courts change with the frequency of royal fancies and whims. We

know from the Ain-i-Akbari for instance about the many changes introduced by Akbar in the forms and shapes of dresses and articles of use, not to speak of the novelties introduced in the mannerisms. From what is seen in the paintings the changes are not always easily discerned. Similarly, it appears that many a things must have become obsolete by the time the paintings were taken up. Obviously in such matters the painter had to depend on verbal information or on his own imagination. In these circumstances the best that can be ascertained from the doubtful. The latter may be taken as prevalent over a broader period of time. For instance, the whole collection of the Tuzuk-i-Baburi paintings can be broadly divided into two groups. The first deals with the themes relating to the emperor's life before his advent into India and the second of those relating to the four years of his rule in India. Evidently however, the artists make little difference in the composition of the respective settings. The interpretation of the Tuzuk-i-Baburi paintings are not to be taken therefore as applicable strictly to the period of Babur, though it may be so in the case of some of the self-evident facts. At any rate they may be considered relevant to the period of Akbar's reign. The relevance of these paintings with the social life in Medieval India, in general, is by no means suggested, though there are clues that help us forming a tentative view of some aspects of life outside the court. However, we have here positive evidence about the aristocracy.

Form the point of view of art the Akbari illustrations are synthe-

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sised primarily with the traditions of the Persian and the pre-Mughal Indian arts. The former reveals itself in bright colour schemes dominated by the Persian blue, crimson, orange, yellow and gold pigments; the superimposition of calligraphed blurbs; in the three quarter-representation of human face; in the modulated contours of hills depicted with springing trees, streams and animals shown perched on them; in the drawing of the objects from the bird-eye-view, disposal of a group of human figures on a very horizon line; in the profusely decorated patterns on floor, shamiyans, costumes and carpets comprising interlacing work; in the always changing focal point of an artist, figures imposed on one another, trees laden with flowers and in the flat treatment of colours. The latter finds expression in the dynamism and rhythm and crowded animation in the representation of human figures; in the elongated eyes, casually the second eye projecting beyond the face line; in the straight, long tree-trunk with dense foliage, in the stylised form of leaves, elephant figures and in the wavery-lines of water often shown with fish and lotus flower. Side by side with this, perceptible traces of the naturalism characteristic of the later Mughal art, begin to show up in the depiction of realistic treatment of tree-trunks and animals.

However the technique depends a great deal on standardised forms and stylised features. There is no standard form of the emperor's face. But more or less in general treatment is similar in many cases. For instance, for the representation of Babur's face - a small, pointed

beard set in an elongated face and the kingly dress seem to have been employed as the characteristic elements of his identity. Akbar's face too, is not identical everywhere. The predominant character of these paintings draws on the accuracy of lines, the neatness of colouring and standard proportions. The representation of the female figures is everywhere standardised. One comes across of a few types being repeatedly drawn. The figure of a horse, an elephant and camel etc. are drawn according a few set lines.

Notwithstanding some of the finer differences distinguishing the early Mughal painting from those of the later period, a certain degree of uniformity persists in the technique, media and conception through out its development. The principle of maximum visibility is faithfully followed as the prime condition of perfect representation. Composition is done in the vertical plane. Distance is depicted either by breaking the part of a theme or by giving them in vertical, ascending order. Casually the distant landscapes and objects in the background are depicted to enhance the effect of depth in the illustration. There is no single direction of light, hence no shadows. Animals, foliage of trees, female figures, hills and such human figures as are not nominated are either stylised or standardised. Human bodies are generally fleshy and age is depicted through external features such as a white beard, a bending waist, a staff in the hand. The principle of forshortening is not fully understood. Action is symbolised by gestures of the hands or the head. Emphasis is laid on the brilliancy of colours. Orange,

crimson red, vermilion red, green, yellow, Persian blue, purple and gold are the main pigments. Gold dust is lavishly used and as far as possible. The scene is decorated by architectural designs, ground sprigged with flowery plants, ornamentation of the ensigns, arms and armour, costumes and finally the hashya. Generally the hashyas are left plain. Blank spaces are not favoured, but are filled by various objects such as plants, animals, birds, tanks and the like, even though irrelevant. Sometimes the dimensions of the object are reduced to such a degree to adjust the blank space that the figure goes out of proportions. Figures are shown cut on the margins most probably, it was done so deliberately to suggest the continuity in the scene.

By the Akbar's time the Mughal art had started showing the influence of the European art, the most significant of which was the introduction of European perspective. The artists employed distant views, diminution of scale with the increase of distance, colours and details blurred at far distance to enliven the scene. Deep shading was casually accepted to produce the three-dimensional effect and to achieve the aerial perspective sky was given an important place. The floating clouds and varying shades could be introduced in its representation. But the traces of these remain few and far in between. Background consisting - castles, cities in diagonal perspective, massed clumps of trees, open-field, river with boats, hunting scene etc. etc; got the elements of the European perspective without always being correctly followed. The general method remains more or less con-

ventional where uniformity of scale is allowed to persist irrespective of distance.

The features of Chinese art are not wanting in the Akbari illustrations. The dragon and some of the motifs with elongated flame like ends and over and above the practice of combining calligraphy with pictorial art similarly point to the Chinese Qalam.

From the point of view of material culture the paintings make a fine source of information. The sartorial habits of the gentry manifest good taste, discreteness and variety. The trend was in favour of covering the maximum part of body. They wore shirts, coats, trousers, caps and turbans. Clothes worn in the winter season differed in material and in the addition of cotton wool padding rather than in fashion. As a matter of fact there is observed a great uniformity in the fashions of all classes of people from the aristocracy to the peasant. Economic and social status was reflected in the quality, sizes and in the absence or presence or in the degree of external embellishment of clothes. Thus if one sought to distinguish the status of a person from his clothes, noblemen and other well-to-do people would be found dressed in clothes of superfine quality embroidered or brocaded; the coat would be long, well plaited and in winter well stuffed with cotton. They would have finally made up turbans plain or embellished with embroidery or ornaments. Among the people at the bottom of the society the coat would seem to lose its long helm, shrinking upto a point above the knees. In some instances a

single piece would go in place of the coat and shirt, resembling a jacket or a waist-coat from the neck upto the waist. The trouser would rise above the ankles even as far as to suffice for a covering for the knee. The plaits disappear. The finally bordered, flowing Katzeb would be replaced by a short plain piece of cloth tied around the waist. The turban would lose its fine folds and ornamentation. The modest, simple cap would become much less frequent. In place of a costly shawl a coarse sheet would seem to be used for a variety of purposes. In general the difference displays itself in the fact that as against the superfine quality of cloth these people dressed themselves in coarse cloth. Royal attendants - guards had special uniforms. This included a tail-coat, a shirt, short trousers, turban or a cap and in some cases socks and shoes. Their caps or turbans were decorated with a long Kalghi or a bird's feather easily discernable from others.

As a matter of rule women wore long flowing dresses. Native women however dressed generally in three pieces including a long plaited petticoat, a choli or a blouse leaving the waist and neck bare and a head sheet. The Peshwaz with round skirt was the common wear of the ladies of court. However the peshwaz with four triangular ends in the bottom was finding out its way among the maid attendants. They sported generally oblong caps with slanted tops of a rich variety and of different forms. The dupatta - head sheet which seems to have been purely Indian dress, seems to have been adopted by the Mughals in a casual manner. The fashion of wearing a head-sheet as

a head-gear is evident from a few illustrations. Shawls or another long sheet of cloth could be thrown on the head and wrapped around the body. In this respect it could be identical in function or form with dupatta. It is notable that the costumes of ladies are invariably plain. Ornaments were in vogue and worn in profusion to embellish from head to feet. Ornamentation was common among the ladies belonging to different strata. The guluband, necklaces, ear-rings, ornamented cross-belt were the common ornaments worn usually. Many of the ornaments worn by them does not appear as the parts on which these are worn, are covered by one or the other cloth. The dancers wore them in profusion as a matter of course.

The soldiers were generally well provided with armour which included the maximum number of pieces that could be put on without incurring obstruction in the movements. There were the helmets, zirih, bagtar, chest and back plates, arm-guards, knee-guards, leg-guards and foot-wears. The helmets could be made with or without hanging mails. Casually, a forehead plate and a visor or nose-guard could also be attached with it. Leg-guards are made in a variety of length. The zirih, bagtar, dastanwa and leg-guards are common armours of a Mughal soldier. Rarely, an arm-plate could be worn in addition to the dastanwa. It is a moulded plate so as to fit the exposed part of the arm.

The animals too, employed in the battle were fully equipped with armours. Cavalry was the main force of the Mughals. The elephants

were casually employed. A horse-armour consisted of Qashqah; gardani - neck plate; chest-guard and urtuk - armour of body made of small chains and plates hinged together. Gardani was a neck armour made separately in two pieces or moulded in one piece fitting to the shape of animal's neck. The chest-guard, one piece armour is rarely used. The pakhar appear the main armour of an elephant. Its body armour is not different in make to that of horse.

The sword, lance, bow and arrow and mace are the conventional arms wielded by Mughals. The chief weapon of a soldier was the sword-sham-shear or a dhup; but he was almost invariably equipped with bow and arrows which came next in importance to the former. In the midst of frays while wielding a sword their quivers are shown full of arrows and we would not be far-wrong to believe that this weapon was reserved for use at the time of pursuing the enemy on flight, though it is well understandable that during sieges and other occasions such as when instead of the plains, hills were the battle ground or even at the eve of an head on attack the bow and arrow must have been most efficacious weapon. The takash kaman, a small slur-bow; shaped in single or double curve was frequently used. The Mughals had quiver (takash) and bow-case (girban) to hold the arrows and bow respectively. These were invariably hanged on the waist in a side. Thirdly comes the spear. The mace was casually wielded in the close combat or employed to break the fortified-gates. The Kistin was much favoured during the close combat.

Nobles generally sported the Khanjar or Janghar and rarely a quillon-dagger-Katar. The battle-axe, commonly tabar is much frequently wielded by royal-attendants (guards).

Apart from the conventional arms, cannons of different types are shown to have been used by the Mughal army. In the scene of war and hunt, casually soldiers are shown carrying hand-guns resembling the matchlock. The artillery included both cannon and handguns. The word tufang or banduk commonly used in Persian language have been translated by Beveridge as matchlock which indeed may not be taken as the specification of the weapon's working mechanism. The representation of the matchlocks in the illustrations is not clear enough to provide clues with regard to their mechanism. At any rate this weapon was still in its primitive stage. It was long, difficult to wield and time consuming; fitted on a one-piece wooden rest and had no folding device in the middle. Akbar made a great contribution towards the manufacture of matchlocks. By the first quarter of the sixteenth century the musket and the wheel lock had already been developed and were replacing the conventional arsenal. The handguns (namals) were provided with pivoted cock, priming-pan, ramrod and pargaz - into which the ramrod was put. Though many of the handguns worked like the original matchlock without a trigger. Barrels are long gradually tapering towards the end opening like a funnel.

Cannons represented in the scenes of a siege or casually in a battle field rested on two or four wheels depending on its size and weight.

Lastly the gun- jazail resting on a tripod is shown employed in the siege. This is a long barrelled gun. Babur tells us that the matchlockmen took part in the battles of Khanwa and Panipat. He has also described the method of manufacturing a gun. Among his materialogical technicians specially Ali Quli Khan has developed reliable process of casting the gun. The barrel was cast in mould. Under Akbar newer methods were introduced which included the manufacturing of a barrel by boring solid iron bars, by rolling obliquely to a flat, long iron-sheet or moulding the nozzles. The last process was greatly improved and the nozzles were moulded into parts and these could be taken separately during expeditions and assembled together when required. If colouring can be of any use it may be said that cannons were made both of iron and brass.

The rubab and chang are the main musical instruments played for entertainment in the accompaniment of the male or female or the both dancers. The female dancers invariably wielded castanets in their palms. Sometimes the music forms an essential part to accomplish a royal ceremony i.e. birth of a prince, a feast etc. In the large gathering the flute - vertical, the dihul and naqqara - small kettle drums also find their place. The musical instruments of the native land viz. the Veena, tambura and Kamancha were introduced in the Mughal court. The former two could become much popular and were played both by men or women - musicians in the accompaniment of other instruments.

The musical parties shown in the miniatures may be taken the repre-

sentation of the court musicians and dancers. A whole establishment of musicians was attached to the court, in which the naqqarkhana occupied a prominent place. It gave its performance on important occasions, though was commonly employed to announce the daily routine. It was an discernable part of military camp- paraphernalia. The naqqarkhana was accomplished with kettle-drums of varying sizes, pipes of different kinds viz. the urna, qarna, seeng and nafir and cymbals etc. It was considered as an ensign of royalty.

The other insignias included mainly the awrang, sayaban, chhattira and kawkaba. The alms displaying innumerable types of heads included the forms of utensils, lizard, dragon, elephant head and human face etc. etc. The heads of wild-goats, stags, tiger, horse, sheep and a dragon employed in the ornamentation of thrones and boats etc. are not merely decoration and have emblematic significance. The Mughals added the emblems of sovereignty which included a sun, a round disk, globes, head of dragon, animal's head and spear-head etc. The shades viz. scarlet, orange, green, crimson used in the cloth of standards and flags too, are of emblematic significance.

Hunting was considred a royal game. The tigers and deers were the main animals of hunt. For the hunt of deers kamargha was made and the emperor hunted them in the circle by the sword. The arrow was effective when the animals were chased in the jungle. The sword and arrow were the main weapons of hunt though casually a gun was also employed. Akbar wielded a sword frequently to hunt the tigers and

deers. Casually, when he serched the animals on foot, wielded a gun. Besides the hunting, he was equally interested in catching the tigers and wild-clephants. He also introduced some methods of trapping these animals. The animal-fight too, was a source of amusement for which the elephants, deers and rams were employed. It seems that the combat of elephants was only the previlege of an emperor.

The day today routine is characterised by various kinds of formalities while ornamentation is practiced as a matter of course. Whether it is the clothes of the royalty or of their aristocracy, or whether it is a plain gathering of men and women; whether it is the landscape or a palace, the taste of decoration seems to underlie the compositions. However the fondness for ornamental representation of life too displays a sense of proportion. Perhaps it is the carpet and the architectural design that lends itself easily to exaggerated embellishment yet those that are depicted in the paintings are conspicuous for a very restrained expression of the propensity for decore. The patterns of the carpets are complicated though discrete in design, generally done in monotonous and regular small running motifs. Wall and floors are done in simple geometrical patterns. In the garments too the decorational element does not seem to obtrude on the plain alliance of the wearables. The crown of the emperor is bedecked with jewels but rarely.

For one thing some of the essential gadgets are very clearly depicted

The crude form of the Persian-wheel with its crown and drum elements is represented rather faithfully. Among the agricultural tools we find the spade, the plough and the shovel. An improvement in the water-work is inferred from the frequent use of large fountains in the gardens and palaces. The stirrup appears to have become common; so does the horse-shoe. The harness very much resembles the improved type observed in the sixteenth century Europe. An efficient system of water transport is also apparent from the miniatures. There are several types of boats including double deckers. However these are a part of the royal establishment and used only for crossing rivers etc. They are generally simple in construction. Some of them are shown with masts and sails. Boats employed for varying purposes - journey or naval engagement etc; are differently shaped. For ladies boats were made with closed compartments. The boats used for loading or unloading the camp-material and the animals of the army etc. are simple in shape comprising a long-leaf. Boats were also employed for building a bridge on a river. These were specially made for the work and resembled in shape with the punt of today.

For the road-journey peoples travelled in litters carried by two or four men. Litters were made with or without curtains. The royal ladies generally travelled in the imaris - carried by an elephant on its back or in the mihaffa - carried by two camels. The traders had camels and ox etc. to transport the goods. The camels and mules were maintained in the royal stable to carry the camp-paraphernalia etc. The camel was greatly favoured and was also

employed by the insignia holders and the musicians of the nagarkhana who performed on damama, nagqara, suma, qarna, seeng and sanj etc. on the battle-field. The elephant was rarely employed by them.

Various utensils used in the kitchen for cooking and serving the preparations and for feast etc. included the degchi, Qab, large platters, payalas and a rich variety of bottles viz. surahis and minas and other wine-containers. The utensils used for decoration were the flower-pots, candle-sticks and stands for perfume-pots etc. Grace, decorativeness and symmetry are the chief characteristics of the Mughal utensils. The stylised and geometric decoration has been employed without an interruption in their form. These were made of copper, bronze, gold and silver, the latter ones often studded with precious stones.

There are many more items which can be studied in greater detail with the help of written sources as it is the miniatures of the illuminated manuscripts along with other collections provide us with a valuable source for the study of Mughal culture. Such studies are however confined only to the life in the court. The great part of the story remains largely unrelated. It is the lives of the people in general that requires the attention of scholars. In the absence of directly relevant sources the historian can however rely on the pictorial representations of the numerous themes chosen privately or by order of patrons by artists from time to time. Such a mass of material will include albums prepared in the courts,

portraits, independent paintings by the artist and, no less important, the illustrations of fictional texts - a task that is very difficult indeed, none the less necessary.

